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(Cranberry Township, PA) — Freedom-Crider Road in Cranberry Township, Route 228 and river locks and dams will be top priorities for U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire, D-4th, next year when the federal Highway Authorization bill is reauthorized.

The bill is reauthorized every five years and is the main funding bill for highway, transit, airport and rail projects nationwide.

Altmire visited Pittsburgh on Friday, accompanied by Congressman James Oberstar, D-Minn., who is chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, to discuss Western Pennsylvania's transportation and infrastructure.

"I wanted to bring (Oberstar) into the district and show him what our needs are. Western Pennsylvania has enormous infrastructure problems," Altmire said Friday.

Altmire, who is also a member of that House committee, said his top priority is repairing Freedom Road, which runs from Cranberry into Beaver County.

"With the Westinghouse expansion in Cranberry, I want the township to be financially capable of handling the accompanying traffic," Altmire said.

He has earmarked \$750,000 through direct appropriation for the project in 2008. He also sent a letter to state Transportation Secretary Allen Biehler pinpointing the Freedom Road corridor as a number one priority.

The Simon Property Group's proposed plan to build a shopping mall in Cranberry on Route 228 also would be bolstered by improvements to that highway, Altmire said.

"The ability to put in roads and provide good access to (a mall) is what will seal the deal," Altmire said.

To keep cars off the road, Route 28 specifically, Altmire earmarked \$500,000 for the Allegheny Commuter Rail project, which would run from Sarver and Buffalo Township to Pittsburgh.

"Unfortunately, the Freedom Road project has languished for years. The same is true for the Allegheny Commuter Rail line. It's been talked about for years and nothing has been done," Altmire said.

From roads to rivers, Altmire said the infrastructure of southwestern Pennsylvania's waterways is in no better shape than its streets.

Six locks and dams are in Altmire's district, three on the Ohio River and three on the Allegheny River.

One of those dams is the Emsworth Lock and Dam in Emsworth, which is in imminent danger of failure, according to the U.S. Corps of Engineers. The Corps is charged with funding the \$43 million project and completing the repairs.

"If we lost commerce down the Allegheny River, area business would lose millions of dollars," Altmire said.

He hopes with Oberstar seeing southwestern Pennsylvania's crumbling infrastructure, it will have an impact on the transportation committee and help get funds for these projects.

Altmire's district includes much of southern Butler County, including Adams, Buffalo, Clinton, Cranberry, Jackson, Lancaster and Middlesex townships, and Harmony, Mars, Seven Fields, Valencia and Zelienople.